

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

18 February 1949

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM NO. 131

SUBJECT: CIA Comment on Despatch No. 276 Jidda to State dated
27 December 1948

1. CIA strongly concur in US Minister Childs' observations on the strategic importance of Saudi Arabia to the US and agrees with his estimate of King Ibn Saud's desire to establish closer relations with the US. Specifically the following minor points in Minister Childs' despatch might, however, be clarified:

a. Paragraph IV, line 3: Is the thought that Saudi Arabia would be a second line of defense at the beginning of hostilities but would become a first line of defense following the loss of Persia?

b. Paragraph IV, line 5: The use of the terms "ideal flying conditions" and "natural airfields" might be questioned. Presumably what is meant is that flying conditions are better than those in many other parts of the world and that there are many sites which could be quickly developed into airfields.

c. Paragraph VI: The statement that Saudi Arabia is "sounder financially than any other Near Eastern State" is perhaps a little sweeping for a long-run estimate.

d. Paragraph X, line 1: The statement that it is difficult to determine how long King Ibn Saud's patience with the US will endure appears to be somewhat at variance with the statement, in the final sentence of Paragraph VII, that neither the King nor the Crown Prince is likely to be deflected from a policy of the closest possible association with the US.

2. General Comments on Transportation follow:

a. US national interest requires the maintenance of established US commercial air routes to India and the Far East. Saudi Arabia lies directly on such a route.

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b. Saudi Arabia is located considerably to the south of the Near Eastern areas of political unrest and is not likely to be directly involved in Eastern Mediterranean political developments. US private and commercial air interests, therefore, are less likely to be subjected to regulations, restrictions, or cancellation of privileges due to local situations.

c. The US enjoys, for the duration of the air base agreement, full Fifth Freedom traffic rights at Dhahran and most-favored-nation treatment. The US-built and operated Dhahran air base can accommodate the largest types of air transports.

d. The development of US oil interests has increased the importance of Dhahran as a civil airport. The Arabian American Oil Company, ARAMCO, depends upon its own fleet of 22 aircraft based at Dhahran for local transport and for the ferrying of personnel and supplies between the US and the Saudi Arabian oil fields. US and British oil interests now engaged in large-scale developments in the Kuwait area could be advantageously linked by feeder air services with US international air carriers passing through Dhahran.

e. In the event of world conflict, the existence of a properly-equipped civil air route through Saudi Arabia would be of great logistic significance in supplementing military lines of communication.

f. The Jidda report mentions in V the strategic location of Saudi Arabia with respect to important sea routes. It seems clear that control of Saudi Arabia by a strong unfriendly power could completely disrupt highly important ocean traffic by attacks from short distances at the entrance to the Persian Gulf and at both ends of the Red Sea.